

EDUCATION

SPECIAL REPORT



DEMOCRATIC
POLICY
COMMITTEE

SPECIAL REPORT
RICHARD A. GEPHARDT
HOUSE DEMOCRATIC LEADER
MAY 3, 2001

REVISED AND
UPDATED

THE BUSH BUDGET FAILS TO MAKE
EDUCATION A TOP PRIORITY

BUSH BUDGET FAILS TO MAKE EDUCATION A TOP PRIORITY:

Huge Tax Cut Is Crowding Out Investment in Our Schools

– A Revised, Updated Version of Special Report –

The Bush Budget Puts Taxes Before Education

President Bush's budget fails to make education a top priority. The President's budget provides a \$720 billion tax cut for the top 1% of taxpayers. In contrast, it increases education spending by an insufficient \$21 billion over 10 years. (Source: Citizens for Tax Justice; Congressional Budget Office)

There are Huge Unmet Needs in Education

Without the Bush tax cuts for the wealthy, we could make real progress on President Bush's avowed promise to leave no child behind. All Americans support that goal. The public knows full well that educating all our children is the nation's number-one challenge. Right now, we face huge unmet needs.

- **Teaching a Record Number of School-Age Children** – This year, schools confront record enrollments of 53 million elementary and secondary school-age students, and that number will continue to rise. Even beyond the next 10 years, the number of school-age children will continue to increase steadily. The total will rise by 6% between 2010 and 2020.
- **Preventing a Teaching Shortage** – We have to hire more than 2 million teachers, as a result of increasing enrollments, teacher turnover, and the retirement of many veteran teachers. This amounts to replacing over half of the entire teaching force over the next decade.
- **Improving Teacher Quality** – We must seize the moment to make sure the next generation of teachers is highly qualified. Currently, too many of our nation's teachers are not properly trained to do an effective job in the classroom – 7% of all teachers are not fully certified, and 24% of middle and high school teachers do not have a college major or minor in their main teaching subject.
- **Attracting the Best and Brightest to Teaching** – We are not attracting nearly enough of the best college graduates into teaching, and we are not holding on to many of the most qualified teachers. There is little mystery as to why. Teachers are significantly underpaid. According to one analysis, teachers with bachelor's degrees are paid at a level 38% below others in the workforce with the same education.

Whether new teachers will be drawn from highly-qualified new graduates will largely be determined by whether we provide a greater financial incentive to enter teaching.

- **Cutting the Size of Classes** – More teachers and smaller classes are important to help all students, and they have a dramatic impact on those from low-income families. In fact, smaller class sizes are key to substantially closing the achievement gap between high-performing and low-performing children. But today, nearly 80% of our classes have more than 18 students. To leave no child behind, we must reduce the size of classes by helping schools recruit and hire more teachers. To cut the size of every classroom to 18 students would require adding more than 500,000 teachers.
- **Making our Schools Modern and Safe** – We have not properly maintained our schools so they can offer quality education. Too many children are sitting in classrooms that do not meet minimal health or safety standards and many others are attending classes in trailers. There is an estimated backlog of \$127 billion in repair and renovation needs for existing school buildings, and that does not include money for new schools that are needed to get kids out of trailers.

In addition to these unmet needs, it is clear that we must do more to improve school safety -- hiring more school counselors and expanding after-school programs.

Bush Budget Falls Short on Education Challenges

“President Bush’s message on education has gone from a shout to a murmur. He will not be able to turn around failing schools with his anemic education budget. ... I remain committed to the kind of education reforms the President and I discussed earlier this year. But education reform without real education resources is not reform at all.”

– Rep. George Miller, Ranking Democrat on Education & Workforce Cmte

As Rep. George Miller points out, in the face of these huge unmet needs, the Bush budget fails to make education the top priority.

President Bush Proposes the Smallest Increase for Education in Six Years. To make room for his huge tax cuts, President Bush’s budget would provide \$44.5 billion for the U.S. Department of Education – only a \$2.4 billion (or 5.7%) increase and the smallest increase in six years (in percentage terms). Over the last five years, education increases have averaged 13%. After accounting for both inflation and enrollment growth, the proposed increase for the Education Department drops to just 3.3%.

The Bush Budget Starves Key Education Initiatives. President Bush provides only a \$2.4 billion increase for education but proposes to spend nearly \$2 billion of that on reading and Pell Grants. He leaves only \$400 million for all other education programs—including all other elementary, secondary, and higher education programs,

special education, and vocational education—less than the Education Department needs just to keep up with inflation. His budget:

- **Eliminates the Class-Size Reduction Initiative/Underfunds the Commitment to More & Better Teachers.** The Bush budget eliminates the Class Size Reduction Initiative by consolidating class size reduction and Eisenhower professional development. The Bush budget also fails to provide enough funding to continue reducing class size and expand professional development and training for teachers. The Bush budget provides far less than Democrats have proposed to improve teacher training and continue on the path to put 100,000 quality teachers in the classroom. This year, there are 37,000 teachers funded through the class size reduction program providing smaller classes to 2 million children. Under the Bush budget, many of these teachers may have to be let go. Further, the Administration proposes to cut by 45% the Teacher Quality Enhancement Program, which focuses on upgrading college teacher preparation, revamping licensing requirements, and assisting high-poverty school districts to recruit high-quality teachers.
- **Zeros Out School Modernization.** Instead of moving forward toward modern and safe schools, the Bush budget eliminates the School Renovation Program next year, and retroactively redirects the \$1.2 billion already appropriated for this year to technology and special education. As many as 1,000 schools in disrepair will not be renovated.
- **Breaks Promise on Increase in Pell Grants.** The budget request is \$1.5 billion short of President Bush's campaign proposal to provide \$5,100 Pell Grants to low-income freshmen. President Bush proposed a \$1 billion increase for the Pell program – but well over \$500 million is needed just to maintain the maximum Pell grant at \$3,750. As a result, the maximum Pell Grant would increase by only \$100 under the Bush budget – from \$3,750 to \$3,850.
- **Freezes Other Student Aid Programs.** The Bush budget freezes at the FY 2001 enacted level (with no increase for inflation) a whole series of student aid programs – including Work-Study, Perkins loans, Supplemental Education Opportunity Grants, and Leveraging Educational Assistance Partnerships (LEAP).
- **Provides Only Modest Increase for Special Education.** In his campaign, President Bush promised to increase resources for special education under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, moving toward federal “full funding” at 40% of the average per pupil expenditures. However, the Bush budget increases funding for special education by only \$1 billion -- putting the federal contribution at only 17% of the average per pupil expenditures.
- **Freezes Funding for After-School Programs.** Specifically, the Bush budget freezes funding for the 21st Century Community Learning Centers after-school program at the FY 2001 level – \$846 million – despite the enormous need for expanded after-school programs. After-school programs can provide low-achieving students the extra help they need to meet challenging academic standards, and are key to keeping kids off the streets after school, and preventing youth crime, and

alcohol and drug use.

- **Freezes Funding for Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program.** Further, the Bush budget also freezes funding for the Safe and Drug-Free Schools program at the FY 2001 level – \$644 million – despite the enormous need for expanded Safe and Drug-Free Schools programs across the country. The Safe and Drug-Free Schools program is a vitally important program – the major federal program providing resources to school districts across the country to combat violence and drug use in the nation's schools.
- **Cuts School Violence Prevention & Safety to Nearly 500,000 Students.** The President proposes to freeze or cut several initiatives that are aimed at preventing school violence, and enhancing academic and mental health services for at-risk students – including the After-School programs and Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program discussed above. Further, the Bush budget eliminates the School Counselors Program, which helps schools to hire counselors to whom students in trouble can turn. In total, these reductions cut school violence prevention services to nearly 500,000 students.
- **Cuts Educational Technology Funding.** The Bush budget provides \$817 million in FY 2002 for educational technology grants to states. This amount is \$55 million less than the FY 2001 level of \$872 million – a cut of 6.3% below a freeze at the FY 2001 level.
- **Eliminates Federal Funding for Reading Is Fundamental.** Despite the President's stated commitment to literacy, his budget eliminates all federal funding for Reading is Fundamental (RIF), a 35-year-old nationwide reading program. RIF provides free, new books and family literacy services to 18,000 school and community sites with the help of more than 310,000 local volunteers.
- **Prevents 1 Million High School Students From Getting More Personal Attention.** The Bush budget proposes to eliminate the \$125 million Smaller Learning Communities Program, which helps redesign large, impersonal high schools that foster student isolation into smaller learning environments, where students can thrive. Approximately 1 million students and 1,000 schools would be denied assistance under the Bush plan.
- **Slashes Funding for GEAR-UP.** The Bush budget slashes funding for the GEAR-UP program by 23.1% relative to a freeze at the FY 2001 level – cutting funding from \$295 million in FY 2001 to \$227 million in FY 2002. The GEAR-UP program provides funds to states and local partnerships to help low-income students prepare for college, starting in the 7th grade. In FY 2001, approximately 1 million students are receiving services under the program. Under the Bush proposal, approximately 225,000 low-income students would not receive pre-college help.
- **Cuts Vocational and Adult Education Funding.** The Bush budget reduces funding for appropriated programs for Vocational and Adult Education from the FY

2001 level of \$1.826 billion to \$1.802 billion. This is a cut of \$24 million below a freeze at the FY 2001 level, and a cut of \$41 million below the amount needed to maintain services at the current level.

- **Cuts Library Services.** The Bush budget proposes \$39 million less for the Office of Library Services even though the First Lady's recently launched her National Library Campaign. Many have been critical of this cut. For example, Emily Sheketoff, executive director of the Washington office of the American Library Association, said "This Administration has a lot of concern about reading, but kids need something to read. If you have a library that has materials that are 10 or 20 or 30 years out of date, kids are going to keep playing video games."
- **Continues GOP Proposals That Divert Funds Away from Public Schools.** Not only does the Bush budget provide insufficient resources to meet our growing education needs, it would actually divert funds away from public schools by calling for private school vouchers and education savings accounts. The budget reiterates the Administration's proposal to allow Title I money to be used to pay for private school vouchers. Further, the Bush budget diverts over \$5.6 billion for tax-preferred Education Savings Accounts to pay for tuition at private and religious schools.

The public strongly supports a national investment in improving the nation's public schools. President Bush should scale back his tax cuts for the wealthy in order to make education the top priority.